



Southeast Fishery Bulletin

National Marine Fisheries Service, Southeast Regional Office, 263 13th Avenue South, St. Petersburg, Florida 33701

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NOAA Announces a Proposed Rule to Implement Annual Catch Limits and Accountability Measures for Reef Fish, Red Drum, Shrimp, and Coral Fisheries of the Gulf of Mexico (Generic Annual Catch Limits Amendment)

NOAA Fisheries Service has published a proposed rule that would implement actions developed by the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council in the Generic Annual Catch Limits Amendment. In summary, the proposed rule would:

- Revise the species in need of federal management.
- Set *annual catch limits* (highest level of landing that is acceptable to maintain adequate stock size) and *annual catch targets* (acceptable levels of landings that provide a buffer, if needed, for management uncertainty).
- Modify procedures that would allow for more timely implementation of management actions.
- Establish *accountability measures*, which adjust catches in-season or in future years to maintain harvests at or less than the annual catch limits.

The Generic Annual Catch Limits Amendment is a very large and comprehensive document, and the actions being proposed cannot be adequately explained in this brief bulletin. The reader is urged to obtain an electronic copy of the Generic Annual Catch Limits Amendment and its associated proposed rule for a more detailed review. In summary, the proposed rule addresses the following issues:

- A determination of which stocks are in need of annual catch limits and which stocks may not need federal management; which stocks can be delegated to other management agencies; and which stocks can be grouped to form species complexes for more effective management.
- Based on the standardized procedures outlined in the amendment, the rule would set annual catch limits and optionally annual catch targets for royal red shrimp, red drum, corals, and a variety of reef fish species or species complexes.

- The rule would establish a flexible procedure by which to implement future management changes in a timely fashion for these managed species.
- Establishment of accountability measures for both in-season and post-season actions. In-season actions would close a fishery during the year if the annual catch limit is projected to be met. Post-season actions would adjust management the following year, if the annual catch limit is exceeded during a year.

Approval of the Generic Annual Catch Limits Amendment would establish some non-regulatory actions as well. It would establish standardized procedures by which to set allowable biological catches and annual catch limits; it would allocate the harvest of three stocks between the Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic Fishery Management Councils; and would allocate black grouper between the recreational and commercial sectors in the Gulf of Mexico.

Dates: Comments must be received no later than 5 p.m., Eastern time, on **November 18, 2011**.

Addresses: You may submit comments on the amendment identified by NOAA-NMFS-2011-0143 by any of the following methods:

- **Electronic submissions:** Submit electronic comments via the Federal e-Rulemaking Portal: <http://www.regulations.gov>. Follow the instructions for submitting comments.
- **Mail:** Steve Branstetter, Southeast Regional Office, NMFS, 263 13th Avenue South, St. Petersburg, FL 33701.

Instructions: All comments received are a part of the public record and will generally be posted to <http://www.regulations.gov> without change. All

Personal Identifying Information (for example, name, address, etc.) voluntarily submitted by the commenter may be publicly accessible. Do not submit Confidential Business Information or otherwise sensitive or protected information.

To submit comments through the Federal e-Rulemaking Portal: <http://www.regulations.gov>, click on "submit a comment," then enter "NOAA-NMFS-2011-0143" in the keyword search and click on "search." To view posted comments during the comment period, enter "NOAA-NMFS-2011-0143" in the keyword search and click on "search." NMFS will accept anonymous comments (enter N/A in the required field if you wish to remain anonymous). You may submit attachments to electronic comments in Microsoft Word, Excel, WordPerfect, or Adobe PDF file formats only.

Comments received through means not specified in this rule will not be considered.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Steve Branstetter, telephone: 727-824-5305, or e-mail: steve.branstetter@noaa.gov.

Comments received by **November 18, 2011**, will be considered by NOAA Fisheries Service in its decision to approve, disapprove, or partially approve the proposed actions. Comments received after that date will not be considered by NOAA Fisheries Service in this decision. All comments received by NOAA Fisheries Service will be addressed in the final rule.

Electronic copies of the proposed rule and supporting amendment with an integrated environmental impact statement, an initial regulatory flexibility analysis, and a regulatory impact review may be obtained from the Southeast Regional Office (see addresses above).

This bulletin provides only a summary of the information regarding the proposed rule. Any discrepancies between this bulletin and the proposed rule published in the *Federal Register* will be resolved in favor of the *Federal Register*.

If you would like to receive these fishery bulletins via e-mail as soon as they are published, e-mail us at: SERO.Communications.Comments@noaa.gov.